The July 4th Flood and Conditions at HCAA's Crying Woman Ranch Site

Mike McBride, September, 2025

The Crying Woman Ranch Site (41KR754) covers 7 acres which are part of a broad terrace above the west bank of North Fork of the Guadalupe River, west of Hunt, TX. The Hill County Archeological Association (HCAA) has performed continuous excavations and research on this site for the past 7 years. Although this area had significant flooding and some structures damaged, the effects were not nearly as devastating as those that occurred along the South Fork above Hunt, and the main river channel through Hunt, Kerrville, Ingram, Center Point, and areas east and south.

The CWR Site had significant damage due to flooding; however, the flooding was not caused by the river inundating the site (Figure 1). The local topography includes a naturally occurring raised bank berm on the west bank, which is 20 feet high on the eastern margin of the site. Observing the debris line after the flood, this part of the river crested at about 18 feet, about its normal level, and did not overflow onto the terrace.

The south and eastern part of the *terrace* is backed by a bluff, which is the margin of rolling uplands, about 15 meters above the terrace level. The uplands include a seasonal spring and creek bed (Joy Spring and Creek), and a watershed that flows off the upland and collects in the north end of the elongated terrace. The collected runoff flows south toward the river channel, directly through the CWR Site via a relief chute depression that was formed prehistorically as the terrace was developed by millennia of river flooding.

Our current excavation projects have involved 2 test unit blocks and 2 backhoe trenches, spread over about 80 meters of slightly elevated ground surface on a prospective Pleistocene terrace adjacent to the foot of the bluff. These excavations have revealed fairly well-stratified components of Early Archaic to Late Paleoindian occupations, radiocarbon dated to at least 10,250cal BP. Significantly, among numerous hearth features and abundant lithic artifacts that secure the dating, we have partially excavated 2 well preserved earth ovens that prospectively date to Late Paleoindian period.

The aftermath of the July 4th flood left all excavation units either partially or fully submerged. From the debris lines and other observations, all the water filling the units came from the heavy rain on the terrace, collected flow from the runoff chute, as well as a dramatic rise in the groundwater table. This has resulted in deep residual water pooling in all of the units, significant wall erosion and slumping, and made efforts at salvage activity currently impossible {Figures 2 and 3) .

Considering small bits of reprieve, our onsite heavy-duty storage tent withstood the runoff water flowing at a depth of about 3 feet, and very few of pieces of our equipment were washed away or lost, mainly dozens of buckets. Additionally, there was a giant pecan tree on the site that collapsed when the rain eroded its root ball. It landed squarely on our field latrine; however, we were able to retrieve and salvage our portable toilet!

We currently continue to assess plans to begin salvage efforts but will need to wait for dryer conditions and more manageable water levels. **We have sincerely appreciated the notes of support and offers of help that we have received from our TAS colleagues, and we'll continue to communicate our progress.**

Figure 1: Another photo of the site--an overview with some archaeological equipment flood debris.

All photos courtesy of Mike McBride

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Figure 2: Before-and-after July 4 flooding at Paleo Trench 3

Figure 3: Before-and-after July 4 flooding at Excavation Block 2.

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